

H3 Heathland

HABITAT ACTION PLAN

1. Habitats covered

1.1 'Heathland' includes a variety of vegetation types in which low-growing ericaceous shrubs are the dominant species, and usually occur on acid, nutrient-poor and free-draining substrates. They occur both in the lowlands but are generally more common at altitude. On dry, free-draining soils 'dry heathland' occurs, characterised by species such as heather, bell heather, bilberry and western gorse. On waterlogged ground 'wet heathland' is typical, with species such as cross-leaved heath, deer-grass, sphagnum mosses, cotton-grasses and sundew etc. In many locations these heathland communities form complex habitat mosaics with purple-moor grass and rush-pasture ('rhos pastures'), acid and neutral grasslands and bracken. Heathland is also an important element of the 'ffridd' (ie valleyside) habitats of south Wales.

2. Current Status

- 2.1 Heathland is a scarce and declining habitat throughout Europe. About one-fifth of the world's total area of lowland heathland occurs in Britain and Ireland. The total area of lowland heathland in the UK is approximately 58,000 ha, of which approximately 7,000 ha occurs in Wales. CCW Phase I Habitat Survey data recorded about 340 ha of lowland heathland in Gwent, 17 ha being in Monmouthshire. This represents less than 1% of the Welsh heathland resource.
- 2.2 All of the heathland within Monmouthshire can be considered to be lowland in character, as distinct from upland heathland. The 300m contour is generally considered to be the boundary between the two habitat types.
- 2.3 Lowland heathland is a UK BAP Priority Habitat and features on the WAG's "Section 42" List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for Conservation of Biological Diversity. Local Authorities can designate heathland habitats as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).
- 2.4 The majority of the heathland elsewhere in Monmouthshire is now reduced to small fragments, although some of this is currently undergoing restoration work to improve its ecological value. The CCW Phase I Habitat Survey data shows a concentration of heathland sites in the Wentwood Forest, Trellech Ridge and Graig Syfyrddin areas.

- 2.5 The former heaths near Trellech Village are largely dominated by bracken. The previously extensive areas of heathland at Trellech Common have been reduced to fragments in woodland plantation rides and tracks and on the fringes of Cleddon Bog, although recent tree felling has allowed some heathland recolonisation in these areas.
- 2.6 Heathland is an important component of uncultivated valleysides, otherwise known as the ffridd. Ffridd comprises an intricate mosaic of heath, bracken, acid grassland, woodland and rhos pasture. The ffridd is important for a variety of species including the pearl-bordered and high brown fritillaries, although there are no recent records for either of these species in Monmouthshire.
- 2.7 Heathland habitats support a wide range of rare and characteristic species, especially birds, invertebrates, flowering plants and lichens. Birds breeding in heathland situations include nightjar, stonechat, linnets, yellowhammers, whitethroats and tree pipits, whilst characteristic invertebrates include moths such as the wood tiger, clouded buff, fox moth, emperor moth and oak eggar. Heathlands are often also particularly valuable for reptiles.

3. Current factors affecting the habitat

- 3.1. Lack of management e.g. undergrazing leading to encroachment by scrub and bracken.
- 3.2. Recreational pressures e.g. motorbike scrambling and off-road vehicles; dog-walking, leading to localised nutrient enrichment.
- 3.3. Problems with agreeing management for common land.
- 3.4. Lack of adequate survey information leading to inappropriate management.

4. Current action

- 4.1 None of the SSSIs within the county have been designated principally for their heathland habitat, although Cleddon Bog SSSI, which is the best example of a lowland bog habitat in Gwent, supports heathland at its fringes.
- 4.2 Lowland heathland is a selection feature for SINC designation, although there are not yet any sites which have been so designated to date.
- 4.3 The agri-environment scheme 'Tir Gofal' offers grant aid on a whole-farm basis, and encourages farm management practices that are sympathetic to, or encourage the maintenance of, heathland.

- 4.3 Coed Cadw (the Woodland Trust Wales) have recently acquired large areas of Wentwood Forest, some parts of which are contain heathland, or are proposed for heathland restoration.
- 4.4 Heathland restoration is currently being undertaken at Broadmeend and Beacon Hill by Forestry Commission Wales.
- 4.5. Monmouthshire Countryside Services are currently undertaking heathland management at Whitelye Common and Grayhill (also known as Mynydd Llwyd). Whitelye common is a small bog and recent work has included clearance of invading birch.

5. Proposed targets (Source: Wales Biodiversity Partnership, Wales Disaggregated Targets, 2007 and Pers correspondence CCW)

- 5.1 Maintain the current extent of all existing lowland heathland in Monmouthshire (62ha).
- 5.2 Maintain the area of lowland heathland currently in favourable condition. (9ha).
- 5.3 Improve the condition of lowland heathland on sites currently in unfavourable condition (18ha).
- 5.4 Increase the extent of lowland heathland in monmouthshire (5ha).
- 5.4 Increase the number of heathland patches of over 30ha.

6. Proposed actions and key partners for Heathland

Action	Key Partners		Timescale
	Lead	Partners	
1. Policy and legislation			
1.1 Ensure that heathland sites are not adversely affected by development. Areas to be afforded protection in UDP.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing
1.2 Ensure heathland sites are fully considered when assessing any development, which may impact upon the habitat.	MCC	CCW, GWT	Ongoing
1.3 When there is no alternative ensure that appropriate mitigation or compensation measures for heathland are implemented during development.	MCC	WAG, CCW MCS, GWT, MDP, MDC	Ongoing
1.4 Where appropriate, ensure opportunities for enhancing heathland are used during the planning process.	MCC	GWT	Ongoing

2. Funding / Resources			
2.1 Grant aid and incentive schemes such as Tir Gofal and MCC Biodiversity Grants should be used to encourage owners to manage heathland.	WAG, MCC, FCW	CCW	Ongoing
3. Site Safeguard and Protection			
3.1 Ensure that all examples of heathland, which meet the relevant criteria, are designated as SINCs.	MCC	CCW, GWT	Ongoing
3.2 Ensure that the EIA Regulations for Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas are implemented on all areas of lowland heathland	WAG	CCW, MCC	Ongoing
4. Habitat and Site Management			
4.1 Ensure that all County and Community Council owned heathland sites are appropriately managed.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing
4.2 Aim for positive management to be extended to all privately-owned heathland sites.	MCC, CCW, GWT	Landowners	Ongoing
4.3 Promote and support grant schemes including Tir Gofal, MCC Biodiversity Grants and/or management agreements to secure favourable management and restoration of heathland habitats, taking into account the needs of associated species and habitats.	CCW, MCC, GWT	Landowners	Ongoing
4.4 Maintain existing positive management for heathland on sites managed by partner organisations.	FCW	CCW, Coed Cadw MCS	Ongoing
4.5 Eliminate where possible alien vegetation e.g. Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam etc.	Invasive Species Partnership	MCS	Ongoing
5. Habitat Creation / Restoration			
5.1 Identify key areas for heathland expansion using a strategic approach appropriate	FCW	Coed Cymru, FCW, MCC, CCW, Landowners	
5.2 Increase the extent of lowland heathland through appropriate creation and restoration methods.	FCW	Coed Cymru, FCW, MCC, CCW, Landowners	
5.3 Seek external funding for heathland management, restoration,	FCW	Coed Cymru, FCW, MCC,	Ongoing

and re-creation including acquisition.		CCW, GWT, Landowners	
5.4 Influence forestry design and management to promote the restoration of heathland from coniferous woodland, and encourage the appropriate management of existing heathland areas.	FCW	Coed Cadw	Ongoing
5.5 Influence private landowners to seek to re-establish heathland in key areas.	MCC	Landowners	Ongoing
6. Research and monitoring			
6.1 Ensure extent, type and condition of all of the heathland resource is accurately recorded. Compile existing information (eg Phase I, CCW Upland Vegetation Survey, SINC surveys) and undertake new survey work as required.	MCC	CCW, BSBI	Ongoing
6.2 Re-assess the current site boundaries and condition of all lowland heathland within the next 5 years and develop a programme of regular site survey and monitoring of management for all managed sites to ensure best practice.	MCC	MCS	Ongoing
6.3 Establish an inventory of all nationally scarce, Red Data and priority BAP species within heathland habitats in Monmouthshire.	MCC	SEWBRcC	Ongoing
6.4 Encourage the general public to record and report to SEWBRcC species found in heathland habitats.	MCC	SEWBRcC	Ongoing
6.5 Identify suitable areas for potential heathland recreation and for creation of buffer zones around key sites.	MCC	Coed Cymru, FCW, MCC, CCW, GWT, Landowners	Ongoing
7. Communication -Advisory			
7.1 Raise awareness of the conservation importance and decline of heathland.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing
7.2 Provide advice on the interest and management of heathland, as required, to landowners, occupiers, the public and partner organisations.	MCC	CCW, MCS, GWT, Landowners	Ongoing

This is particularly important on sites of SINC quality.			
7.3 Reverse trend of heathland fragmentation by targeting land owners/managers of isolated areas for habitat agreements.	MCC	Coed Cymru, FCW, MCC, CCW, GWT, Landowners	Ongoing
8. Communication - Publicity			
8.1 Raise public awareness of lowland heathland and associated species through media articles, open days, farm walks, interpretation and events.	MCC	GWT, CCW, MCS, FCW	Ongoing
8.2 Raise awareness of heathland and its conservation among landowners and managers by publishing articles in relevant publications and giving talks to relevant groups (e.g. publications and local meetings of NFU, FUW and CLA.)	MCC, FWAG	GWT, CCW, Landowners	Ongoing

7. Link to other plans

7.1 The Plan should be considered in conjunction with the habitat action plans for wetlands (ponds, fens and bogs), Species rich grasslands (lowland acid grassland and rhos pasture). Associated species include brown hare, nightjar, linnet, skylark, great crested newt, adder, slow worm, common lizard and pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*).

8. Abbreviations

AONB	Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BSBI	Botanical Society of the British Isles
CLA	Countryside Landowners Association
FUW	Farming Union of Wales
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
GOS	Gwent Ornithological Society
GWT	Gwent Wildlife Trust
MCC	Monmouthshire County Council
MCS	Monmouthshire Countryside Service
MDP	Monmouthshire Development Plans
MDC	Monmouthshire Development Control
NFU	National Farming Union
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SEWBRcC	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government

9. References

Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report - Volume II: Action Plans (December 1995, Tranche 1, Volume 2, p323)

APPENDIX - NVC COMMUNITIES

The following NVC communities are likely to occur within the county.

Dry Heath

H8: Heather - western gorse heath

Calluna vulgaris - *Ulex gallii* heath

This community type often occurs as part of a heath/acid grassland mosaic. It is characterised by the presence of western gorse.

H10: Heather - bell heather heath

Calluna vulgaris - *Erica cinerea* heath

This community may occur in small patches within the county borough, but is unlikely to form a major community type within the area.

H12: Heather - bilberry heath

Calluna vulgaris - *Vaccinium myrtillus* heath

H18: Bilberry - wavy hair grass heath

Vaccinium myrtillus - *Deschampsia flexuosa* heath

These are the likely to be the most commonly occurring heath communities in the county borough.

H19 Bilberry - *Cladonia* lichen heath

Vaccinium myrtillus - *Cladonia arbuscula* heath

This community may occur in small patches within the county borough, but is unlikely to form a major community type within the area.

Wet Heath

M15: Deerglass - cross leaved heath wet heath

Trichophorum cespitosum (*Scirpus cespitosus*) - *Erica tetralix* heath

M16: Cross-leaved heath - *Sphagnum compactum* wet heath

Erica tetralix - *Sphagnum compactum* wet heath